

CHAPTER VII.

THE THEERTHAS Etc. OF THE STHALA.

Every hoary Kshetra has its Theertha Vishesha. The Theerthas are reputed to bestow immense blessings upon the devotee. They also possess highly curative properties. Such Theertha Vishesas will be confined in many Kshetras to one Theertham only, but in some very ancient Stalas to more than one, and such number rarely exceeds 2 or 3. It is only in very rare instances like Rameswaram, the Theerthams are very many, but the number will have a limit even there. But here in Thirumalirunjolaimalai their number is in myriads, say the Seers. Says Sri Periyalwar:

ஆயிரம் தொப்பரப்பி முடியாயிரம் மின்னிலக
ஆயிரம் பைத்தலைய அனந்தசுமனன் ஆனும்மலை
ஆயிரம் ஆறகளும் சுனைகள் பல வாயிரமும்
ஆயிரம் பூம்பொழிலு முடைமாலிருஞ் சோலையதே!

But are these thousands of rivers, Thousands of springs etc. visible to us mortals? They are not. Some pious Sanyasins even to day go up the Hills and stay for weeks together for their Tapasya in mysterious places where no ordinary man dares to stay even for a single night. Strange and thrilling are the stories that one hears of, as regards the Theerthams, Herbs, Wealth, and Holiness of these Hills. This is neither the place nor the purpose of these notes to enter into their details here. A very short resume only is purported to be given here with reference to these Holy Theerthams. The great Theerthams of Punya Sravanam, Bava Harani, and Ishtasiddhi so grandly and vividly described in the Puranas and Silappadhikaram are not identifiable or traceable now. But Mother Sri Noopura Ganga is there showering Her blessings on her devotees that resort to her.

Sri Noopura Ganga or Silambaru.

This famous and holy water - fall is believed to have its origin from the Noopura (an ornament worn in the leg) of Sri

Mahavishnu. When His feet in His Trivikrama Avatara was washed by Lord Brahma the waters sticking to the Noopura of the Lord began to issue forth as a spring and this spring is stated to be the "Noopura Ganga". It is at a distance of about 2 miles up the hills from the temple, at a height of about 2000 feet above the sea level. Its source is not perceptible. But one could only see the water at the exit of the Gomukhi rushing and gushing forth like an "elephant's trunk". Great sanctity is attached to these waters, and high curative properties as well and are reputed to be rich in iron and copper. A bath in the water fall on the Dwadeshi, New Moon, Full Moon and Eclipse days as well as on the Tuesdays of the weeks is considered highly efficacious. After its emergence from the bosom of the rocks, it forms into a rivulet and goes by the name of the Thiru Silambaru, flowing in a southerly direction for some miles and then emptying itself into the irrigation tanks thereabouts. This is described in the ancient works as "Then Aru" or "River of Honey" owing to the splendid taste its water bears. गङ्गा स्नानम् नुक्तापानम् is a much parodied expression. But the waters of the Noopura Ganga excel both Ganga and Thunga both in the sacredness of the bath and in the efficacy of the water for drinking purposes. The water of this Noopura Ganga is often packed and sent to distant parts of India by devout worshippers as in the case of the water of the Ganges. It is a well known fact and an insolvable problem for Scientists and Bacteriologists that a peculiar property is possessed by the waters of the Ganges in that the bacteria die in the waters of the Ganges proper, while they multiply in their myriads in the waters of the wells and tanks and other storages near by. Dr. Hankin, the Government Bacteriologist of Allahabad has experimentally demonstrated the destruction of the cholera microbes, the moment they are put in Ganges water. Being a perennial stream, until recently this Silambaru as its name implies was always flowing with the waters from the waterfalls with its tinkling music throughout

all the seasons of the year in more or less volumes. But alas! it has now of late become farcical to call this river "Silambaru", for what was once a cool and perennial and full flowing stream, has now become all in a sudden but a dark, deep and barren ravine full of pebbles and rubbles for reptiles to hide and rest. And even at its head the once famous Noopura Ganga has but a diminished flow only. The Silambaru, to bathe in which the pilgrims congregate, in their thousands, is now stated to be in a way a Kaliyuga disappointment. But all the same this is yet a perennial place of pilgrimage and is resorted to by hundreds and at times thousands of pilgrims every day for its holy baths. Whether in the higher worlds, or on this Earth or even in our own body, Seers say that three magnetic Currents prevail. In the human body, they are Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. On this terrestrial globe they are Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, the last being supposed to be flowing latently as an Antaryahini River. The Divine Ganga of Solar Current in the Higher Worlds which Baghiratha the solar king tried to bring down into this Earth formed one of the 3 currents in the Higher worlds. The Noopura Ganga is stated to be more efficacious than the Ganges itself.

In these Alagar Hills, which alone were preserved in the Pralayas and where Sri Mahavishnu is in Sannidhya, the Ganga which sprang from the Noopura of his foot evidently represents the Divine Current. The Garuda and the Hanumar Theerthams represent the other magnetic currents. Besides the Noopura Ganga the many tanks in the Alagar Hills like the Bandari Vapi, the Arama Vapi, the Agni Pushkarani, the Krishna Vapi, the Dakshina Narayana Pushkarani, the Uthara Narayana Pushkarani the Mangala Theertham (Manjal Kinaru or Alagia Manavalan Kinaru) etc. are all now deprived of their sources of supply and it would be a horrible sight to have a look at them with their deep and empty and parched up hungry bowels. A bath in the Noopura Ganga which is stated to be also

known as "Ishta Siddhi" fulfills whatever desires one may cherish. She has given Vishnu Salokya to Dharma Devata, Vishnu Sameepya to Brahma, Vishnu Saroopya to Suthapas or Mandooka Muni and Vishnu Sayujya to Marichi and other sages as they all respectively desired. Mortals, if with a pure heart and mind, take a bath in this Noopura Ganga either on Tuesdays or Dwadasi days and more especially in the Sukla Paksha Dwadasi day in the month of Arpisi, they are stated to attain the highest Sreyas. Even the birds and beasts and the most degraded of sinners also are no exception to this, for they also along with the Mortals and Immortals obtain the greatest and most transcendental bliss.

The Hanumar Theertha and Shrine.

This is an ancient and very holy Theertha situate at a height of 1068 ft. and at a distance of $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles up the hills from the temple. It is highly venerated and resorted to by the pilgrims.

The Garuda Theertha and shrine.

This is situate at a height of 1108 ft. and at a distance of $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles up the hills and is a similar Thirtha held in high and equal esteem with Sri Noopura Ganga.

The Pandava Theertha and shrine.

A pilgrimage to the same and a bath in the same is reputed to confer high spiritual efficacy.

The Periya Aruvi.

This is situate on the northern slopes of the Hills and at about a mile north of the Sri Noopura Ganga, of which it is stated that even a look at the same will ward off all sins.

The Uthara Narayana Vapi.

It is situate a little to the north of the temple. The waters of this Theertha alone should be used for the bath of the

temple Parivara Devatas and Bakta Bimbas, as well as for the cooking of all the offerings to the various Sannadhis or shrines in the Hills and the Fort areas. People are not allowed to get into the Theertha. But buckets are provided with which they may draw water therefrom.

The Venu Theertha. or Moongil Gavi.

It is another holy spot reputed to be resorted to by the sages in the Hills.

The Kadhali Vapi or Valai Gavi.

It is another and similar holy spot.

The Brindha Vana or Mattuppannai.

It is another mystic spot which is stated to be resorted to by the Divine cows of the Hills, and for a darsan of which the anxious pilgrim is not afraid it is stated, to attempt his desperate climbings.

Thirumanjana and Thiruvaradana Theertham for Lord Alagar.

Every temple in India has its holy Theertha which may be either a tank or a well either within its precincts or close by. The water to be used either for the Pooja purposes or for the bath of the deity of the temple, is generally taken only from that ordained and sanctified source. Here the source for the supply of Theertham to Lord Alagar is the Noopura Ganga only. Everyday throughout the year, whatever be the season or the weather, men have to plod up the weary hills all these 2 miles either way with a heavy pot on head to fetch this holy water. It is a weary and onerous task. But it has to be done all the same. Manibams are also attached to this service. The formalities attached to this daily supply of water is peculiar and interesting. The man that brings the water takes it not direct to the Temple Sannadhi from the fountain head. He has first to take it to the Sannadhi of Sri Padinettampadi (the

divine watchman of the temple), place it in reverence before the Sannadhi and then he is supposed to swear that this water was brought by him in a pure manner from the Noopura Ganga only and from no other source. After which ceremony the pot of water is taken in procession in Pradakshana with music and temple paraphernalia etc. to the Lord's presence. Such are the formalities observed in the Theertha affairs in this temple. And the Lord is so very particular and strict with his daily supply of Noopura Ganga water that even when he goes to Vandiyur and Madura 15 and 18 miles off, He insists on this, his daily supply of water from the Noopura Ganga direct. One may wonder and question within himself as to why these hard and fast restrictions and why this punctilious observances of this order for these thousands of years. These questions are difficult to answer. But there is this glaring fact which itself may serve at once as an answer first but at the same time start a problem for savants and scientists for solution. That secret is, the Great Lord Alagar, the inimitably beautiful Lord as he is in all the universe, immediately changes colour and turns black, if any other water of this world but His Noopura Ganga water is used for his Abisheka. It is a problem too deep to be dilated upon here.

The Stala Vriksha.

Every Stala has its own Stala Vriksha, which is reputed to have miraculous properties. The devout pilgrim and worshipper never fails to circumambulate the stala Vriksha whose fallen leaves, he reverentially picks up and applies them to his eyes and dons them in his head with deep veneration. But in mystic stalas like these hills which have no known origin, such Stala Vrikshas change with the Yugas in their efficacy and sanctity! Here, in the Kritha Yuga it was the "Banyan", in the Thretha Yuga it was the "Arasu", in the Dwapara Yuga it was the "Puthra Jeevi" or the "Bilva", and in the Kali Yuga it is the "Puthra Jeevi" or

Pratipa Dhruma." What is this Pratipa Dhruma or Putra Jeevi it could not be definitely ascertained. Some say it is the sandal wood tree and some say it is the Bilwa only. There are others who say it is a Jyothir Vriksha. From the description in Silappadhikaram it is deemed to be "Karnikara". Sri Bogar the great Siddha and Yogin has revealed in certain stanzas of his Janana Sagaram that it is "Jyotir Vriksha". Even Mohanjo Daro had its Stala Vriksha worshipped in due from. There it was the 'Pipal' according to Rev. Fr. Heras and the discoveries of Sir Jhon Marshall.

CHAPTER VIII.

JEWELS AND VAHANADHIS.

Though the value of the jewels in this temple is not so much as it might be in certain other institutions like Thiruppathi or Rameswaram or Madura, being worth only between two to three lakhs of rupees, still many of the gems and jewels here are admirable, rare and of great antiquity.

In ancient works like Navarathna Chinthamani etc. this Thirumalirunjolai has been reputed to be the storehouse of vast and valuable gems and pearls. Every one knows the expression “அரங்கன் சொத்து அழகர் அங்கவடிக்கு காணாது.” i. e. all the wealth of Sri Renganadha put together will not be equal to the value of even a single jewel viz. the stirrup of Sri Alagar. So vast and immense has been the wealth of the deities here! To the Lord's Karuvelam, various kings of the Pandya, Chola, Bana, Hoysala, Nayak, Kerala, Mahratta, Marava and other dynasties, besides various other devotees, have made their combined contributions. Contributions of jewels to the Lord's Karuvelam have been made not only by the devout Hindu but also by devotees belonging to other religions. Contributions from Messrs. Rouse Peter, Robert Foulkes, Walter Elliot Garret and others are still to be found in the Lord's Karuvelam and are all in constant use for the Lord.

Some of the rarest and most ancient jewels that can be found in the Lord's Karuvelam are the various Padakkams and other ornaments, Navarathnams of superb sizes, not available in these modern days. Though there are many kinds and varieties of gems, our ancients considered that of these nine only were of primary importance Viz., “வஜ்ரசம், (வைசம்), வைத்திரம், முத்தி, மரணிகம், மரகதம், புஷ்பபஞ்சம், பவணம், சீலம், கோமேதகம்.”

The Navagrihas (the Sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Euranus and Neptune) are respectively

stated to represent the nine precious stones or jewels (diamond, pearl, ruby, emerald, Cat's eye, opal, amethyst and sapphires.) Set in armlets or bracelets they are worn as amulets in propitiation of the Navagrahas who are reputed to influence these jewels and their wearers.

The *Diamond* that secures, promotes and sustains 'Love', the *Emerald*, that guards against witchcraft and abichara prayogas and endures to eternity, the *Amethyst* that wards off evils of sorts, the *Jade* that roots out all internal evils, the *Sapphire* that keeps melancholy at bay, the *Topaz* that plays the shield against bunacy, the *Agate* that keeps off the brutes and beasts of prey and acts as a charm against dreams, the *Onix* that maintains and increases the domain of the owner—were all treasures, this institution was proud to possess. Many of these could still be seen in the Karuvelam. The best he loves, the ardent devotee places at the feet of the Lord. Hence these treasures in our ancient Devastanams. The pious Hindu's intense faith is that Mountains, Salagramas, and the various gems female and male all grow and increase and have life in them as men possess. Hence he attaches peculiar merits to the presentation of gems and jewels to the Lord.

The size and workmanship of the jewels here and their attractive appearance can all be appreciated to the full only if one has a look at these ornaments.

One jewel needs some special mention, and that is the "Salagramamalai". The Salagramamalai of Sri Sundararaja and Paramaswami which are made of some of the rarest and holiest selections in this ancient institution, covered in simple mounts of gold and strung into a garland is a very rare and magnificent ornament. It is a universally acknowledged fact that there is some magnetic and indescribable beauty and attraction the devotee feels on having a Darsan of the Lord with his Salagramamalai on.

The "Pandyan Kondai", a massive headdress of gold, wrought with pearls, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and various other gems and valued at about Rs. 10,000. is an ornament reputed to have been presented by the Pandyan monarchs about a thousand years ago.

From time immemorial it was the boast of the Pandya Nad that it was the unrivalled possessor of the most brilliant varieties of finest specimens of pearls. And naturally the Pandyan Kings were munificent in their gifts of pearls and ornaments of pearls to Lord Sundararaja. The Lord's Muthangi and Muthu Talaippahai are fine pieces of workmanship with which the Lord is decorated only once in a year in the Dasavathara Darsana during the Great Chitra Festival. The Muthu Malai, the Muthu Kadivalam (reins) that are used for the Golden Horse Vahanam are also rare and valuable specimens. The Muthu Padutha (முத்துப்படுதா) or Screen of Pearls is unique in its appearance, design and workmanship. Being a screen of the Pandyan period and now some ten centuries old it is in a damaged condition calling for immediate and urgent repairs.

The Lord's Kalasappanai.

It is an ancient present, the Kainkaryam of Kalai Mahabali Bana Adhiraja. It bears the following interesting engraving.
 "சுவாமி ஆண்டவன் அழகருக்கு காலைமாவலிவாணத்தி ராசா உபயம். வென்
 னிக்கலசப்பானை தூக்கம் அராஉயெ மது வைவிதகன்படிக்கு வீ. சுளசய
 பணவடை ௫". The gift is of the year 1464 or thereabouts.

And last but not the least the Valamburisankams of this temple are some of the rarest specimens that one can meet with. Some say the bigger Valamburisankam available here has no compeer any were else in these parts. The administration is indebted to the gift of this priceless treasure to the devotion of Rao Sahib Sri A. Kadirvelu Pillai of Madura one of the ardent devotees of this temple. Valamburisankams or the right-turned

chanks (*Turbinella pyrum*) are very rare. They are considered to be very sacred. The place of their origin is only the Mahodhadhi, where from they are obtained on very rare occasions during auspicious constellations. The only other exceptional place of their origin is the famous and sacred Sankha Theertha (Thirukkalikkundram) where at regular auspicious intervals once in twelve years, a solitary Valamburi Sankam makes its appearance after showing certain supernatural signs of its intended visitation, on which occasion, all the Temple Sibbandhis and the town's people accompanied by the Temple Music and Paraphernalia go to the Sanka Theertha to give a reception to the Sankam in a suitable manner.

Vahanadhis.

This Temple Vahana Sala possesses some of the most beautiful Vahanams and is well worth a visit. They are mainly Golden, some are in silver and some in ivory. The horse Vahanam and the Sesha Vahanam are reputed to be the finest and the grandest available in any Devasthanam.

Works of art in ivory are stated to have been once of a marvellous nature in the South of India. The unique Ivory Chapparam of Sri Rangam (now no more in existence) was a wonder of the 15th century and was stated to have been constructed in Saka 1392 (1470 A. D.). This Thirumalirunjolai also is reputed to have possessed an Ivory Chapparam and an Ivory Palanquin. The Chapparam is not extant. Remnants of the Ivory Palanquin are preserved in the Sri Sundararaja Museum.

The Ivory Vimana and Bedstead.

In the south west corner of the IIIrd Prakara facing east is the famous bed chamber or Palliyarai of the Lord. Its entrance is reached by a flight of long and broad steps opposite to which stand the statues of Thirumala Nayak and his Queen and his brother Muthalu Naick and his consort in worshipful and serviceful posture. While at the entrance to the

Bed Chamber stand the statues of Thirumal, Muthalu and their generals in full military accoutrements and standing guard with shields and swords in a posture atonce zealous and pious. Inside this bed-chamber is preserved to this day the traditional Ivory Bedstead stated to have been the Kainkaryam of Thirumal Nayak. Its workmanship though antique is yet unique and of a rare and extremely fine quality. The bed-stead is 12ft length, 10ft in breadth and 15ft. in height. The whole bed-stead is surmounted on a pedestal of rare and finely wrought polished black stone of exquisite workmanship, with four similarly carved black stone pillars in its four corners supporting the ivory Vimanam. This Vimanam is constructed in a pyramidal Gopuram like structure and is wrought on an interior wooden frame work which is covered with ivory and adorned with a number of figures all carved out in ivory. The ivory canopy is studded with a number of colored ivory pendants of "lotus flowers". The carvings in ivory enter into very minute and very intricate details and are presumed to be the rarest in existence.

Bala Gopalan Thiruppallikkattil

This is an ancient piece of workmanship, dating from the Pandyan period. Its age is surmised to be of the 11th or 12th century A. D. Still others ascribe to it the Paripadal age when the Krishna and the Balarama cult was most predominant here, basing their reasoning on the mention of "Balagopalan" engraved in the Peetam, and when the presiding deity was worshipped only as Krishna and not Alagar which is stated to be a later name gave to the lord. It is gold plated and bears the inscription

"பால கோபாலன் திருப்பள்ளிக் கட்டில்"

CHAPTER IX.
DEVOTEES AND PATRONS.

Devotees: Great and many have been the devotees who made penance in these Hills and have had their prayers granted. Gods and Demi-Gods, Rishis, Saints, Alwars, and Acharyas, Kings and Peasants have all been blessed in their devotion to the Lord here who has Sri Siva ever by his side. Brahma, Indra, Yama, Sapta Mathrikas, the Gandarvas, the Kinnaras, Anjaneya and Vainatheya, Sri Rama, Sri Lakshmana, Sri Sita, Vibeeshana, Markandeya, Yasodha, Gautama, Sanakadi Maharishis, Saunaka, Dalabya, Parasara, Pulasthya, Marichi, Maithreya etc. have worshipped here. Prahlada, Pururavas, Mahabali, Ambarisha, Pancha Pandavas, Indradyumna, Malayadwaja, Kubja Pandya, Chandra Ketu, and legions of others of the pre-historic period were ever at the Lord's feet here. Coming to historic memory all the Alwars and Acharyas and countless others formed the brilliant galaxy of Sri Sundararaja's worshippers. Were these all?

From time immemorial our Lord Sri Sundararaja has been held in the highest esteem and greatest veneration by the Indian religious world. The word "Indian" is advisedly used, since in this peculiar shrine, Lord Alagar, the presiding Deity embraces amongst His countless devotees not only the Hindu but also the pious Mahomedan, Christian, Parsee and many a man of many other creed. One striking peculiarity especially noticed in this temple, a peculiarity not generally met with anywhere else, in the thousands of the great temples that are studded all over India, is that all castes and creeds not excluding the so called Depressed and Suppressed classes have ever been enjoying the privilege and glory of worshipping Lord Sundararaja here in their time-honoured method of bathing the Lord with the waters, they themselves would touch and bring in their bags of leather. Thus is the great Lord sung of in the ancient poems:—

"To whatever caste, His devotee may belong, of whatever nature he may be, or characteristic he may have, in short who ever he may be or what ever he may be if he (the devotee) but seeks the shadow even of the Lord's feet, that very moment does the All Merciful Lord Sundara Himself assume, out of His unbounded filial affection, the caste, the nature, and the characteristic of His devotee and folds him up in His Divine Embrace. (Sundara Bahustavam St. 30)

Patrons

An enumeration of the Royal Patrons of this temple will swell to a pretty long list and still may be an incomplete one at that for want of further researches in that direction. All the same a glance over the inscriptions (so far deciphered) reveals the following Royal personages who have all contributed in some form or other to the Divine Kainkaryam. The list includes Kings of the Pandya, Chola, Hoysala, Kongu Chola, Bana, Nayak, and other dynasties: Some of them are:—

1. Maravarman alias Sri Maran Sri Vallaba—M. E. R. 313 of '30.
2. Jatavarman Kulasekhara I (and Queen Darani Muludayar)—M. E. R. 275, 276, 279, 280, 281, 295, 296, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, and 303 of '1930 and 22 and 23 of '32.
3. Maravarman Sundara Pandya I—M. E. R. 282 and 288 of '30 and 11 of '32.
4. Jatavarman Kulasekhara II—M. E. R. 22 & 23 of '32.
5. Maravarman Sundara Pandya Deva II—M. E. R. 277, 278, 289, 291, 292, 304, 305, and 308 of 1930 and 9, 7, 17, 18, 19 and 24 of '32.
6. Maravarman Vikrama Pandya Deva—M. E. R. 25 to 27 of '32 and 297 of '30.
7. Jatavarman Veera Pandya Deva—M. E. R. 25 to 27 of '32 and 297 and 325 of '30.

8. Jatavarman Sundara Pandya I—M. E. R. 84 of '29 and 320 and 321 of '30.
9. Maravarman Kulasekhara I—M. E. R. 318, 319, and 323 of '30.
10. Jatavarman Sundara Pandya III.
11. Jatavarman Parakrama Pandya I.
12. Raja Raja Kesari Varman (alias) Raja Raja I—M. E. R. 80 of '10.
13. Rajendra Chola I.
14. Jatavarman Siyan Sri Chola Pandya—M. E. R. 4 of '32.
15. Vikrama Chola Deva.
16. Kongu Chola Veera Rajendra.
17. Kongu Chola Vikrama Chola.
18. Hoysala Nissanka Pratapa Chakravarthin Veera Someswara Deva (Kannada Deva)—M. E. R. 291, 292 & 293 of '30.
19. Krishna Deva Maharaja—M. E. R. 90 of '29.
20. Rama Raja Thirumalai Deva Maharaja—M. E. R. 1 and 29 of '32 and 93 of '29.
21. Achyuta Deva Maharaja (& Queen Varadarajamma)—M. E. R. 88 of '29, 330 of '30 and 30 of '32.
22. Venkata Deva Maharaja—M. E. R. 91 of '29.
23. Sadasiva Deva Maharaja—M. E. R. 86 of '29, and 237, 327 and 328 of '30.
24. Thirumalirunjolai Ninran Mahabali Vanadhiraja—M. E. R. 1 and 12 of '32.
25. Mahabali Bhanadhi Raja Uranga Villidasan—M. E. R. 307 of '30.
26. Mahabali Banadhiraja Sundaratholudayan.
27. Maghada Nayanar (alias) Parakrama Pandya Mahablai Bana Rayar—M. E. R. 21 of '32.
28. Visvanatha Nayak—M. E. R. 88 and 89 of '29.
29. Thirumalai Nayak.
30. Chokkanatha Nayak—M. E. R. 28 of '32.

CHAPTER X.

CULTURAL EMINENCE OF SRI ALAGAR HILLS.

A local tradition has it that Sri Sundararaja was the founder of the famous Tamil Sangam. Hence his name "Sangathazhagan". Kalambaghathar refers to Him as "தமிழ்ச் சைவத் தலை" and as "தண்டபதிற் சங்கத்தனி யிறையயனே". Even villages endowed to Lord Sundararaja were known by their having been named in remembrance of this. Please vide reference to Sangathazhaganallure etc. (M. E. R. 24 of '32.)

His being hailed lovingly as "Sangathazhagan" and His connection with the great Vidhyapita at Sri Alagar Hills are often referred to by the poets (Cf "சுத்தத் தமிழ்ப்பலவர் சங்கத்திருப் பிசியான் சார்பு") — Alagar Kalambagam—St. 68

It is a fact well worth our remembrance that these hills were resorted to by those who wanted to reach the highest limit of knowledge, religious or secular. As that charming and fascinating guide, philosopher and friend Sri Varothama would naively put it, those that resorted hither for pelf, power and plenty, or for knowledge immeasurable and unattainable or for wisdom divine, would have to resort to the different springs and wells of knowledge pure and undefiled in these holy Hills mystic in their origin and magnetic in their effects. Day in and day out these vast Hills were ever reverberating with Vedic chants and hymns which so affected even the other animate creations here that they became subjects of common reference cf.

சுகமும் புகமும்மறை யோதுஞ் செலிலமலைவிலங்கார
சிகமும் பாகமும் வகுத்த பிரானெல்லப் பதமுந்தாவாழ்வீர்
மகமும் தவமும் செய்த தொக்குமானத்தினக் கும்பிடு வானும்
செகமும் பாவுஞ்சிலம்பாற்றத் திருநீர்ப்படி மொருநீரே

Kalambagam—101

If even the Thiryaks like the parrot and the peacock should imitate the Vedic hymns and chants of man and try to vie with him in his holy aspirations, these regions should certainly be an earthly Vaikunta par excellence. In ages gone by the greatness of our country was due to our unique culture nurtured and preserved by our forefathers in our ancient seats of learning and piety. A Gurukula, a Vidhyapita, a Patasala, a Sanga, or a University or by whatsoever name one may call it, such an institution was always considered to be an integral, indispensable and inseparable appanage of any Kshetra of importance. This Thirumalirunjolaimalai was one of such great centres where the Sangam had its first birth through Lord Sundararaja's Grace.

Even in the middle ages, spacious days as they were, in this holy Kshetra flourished various Mutts and schools presided over by eminent teachers, and scholars. They were not only seats of learning and centres of religious activities for the elders, but were always Gurukulas; for the young Vidyarthi whose entire care was in the hands of the more than paternal Gurus that presided at the Yathirajan Mutt, Kulasekaran Mutt, Thirunadudayan Mutt, Vanathirayan Mutt, Amaitha Narayanan Mutt and a host of other Mutts.

It is worthy of note that references are made to students, that found their board and lodge in the "Thirunadudayan" Mutt.—M. E. R. 277, and 278 of '80. (13th century A. D.)

The chanting of the Vedas and the recitation and singing of the Vedic Hymns during Yagas and Yagnas for the sacrificial Ahudhis, the existence of innumerable mutts and centres of learning in the big streets of Thirumalirunjolai that were buzzing with life and activity and the existence of the famous Golden Halls, Mandapams, and Palaces are all vividly portrayed in the works of Sri Arunagirinatha son of the great Pattanathu

Swamigal of Pugar or Kaverippoompattinam, the city that was swallowed by the ire of the ocean in the Pre-Christian era. From such sources we understand that even during his days Thirumalirunjolai was maintaining its pre-eminence and grandeur and cultural glory and that its decadence must have been only in days subsequent to Sri Arunagirinathar. Cf: the excerpts from the Thiruppugal. (Part II p. 182, St. 513)

It has been the peculiar privilege and glory of this holy country to spread its culture far and wide. North India had its Nalanda, Taxilla, Benares, Vikrama Sila etc. mighty centres of learning, nourished and fostered by large-hearted souls. South India too did not lag behind, but vied with the north in no mean proportion. The Vidhya Pita of Salotgi in the district of Bijapore founded by the Rashtrakuta King Krishna III in the 9th century A. D. and attached to the temple of Sri Trayi Purusha boasted of as much as 27 Boarding Houses for the students of the Vidhya Pita. That at Ennayiram in South Arcot founded by Rajendra Chola had in its highest classes about 400 students who were imparted instructions in all the Vedas, Vedantas, Agamas, Prabandhas, Language, Literature and Philosophy. The famous Vidhya Pita at Thirumukkudal in Chengleput District founded in the 11th century by Vira Rajendra Chola and attached to the Sri Venkatesa Perumal temple there at, had besides its colleges, a College Hospital, and a Public Hospital also that went by the name of "Vira Cholan". The Hospitals were not mere dispensaries but were full fledged hospitals possessing up to date conveniences and comforts, with beds for in-patients, and well trained nurses and various other Sibbandhis catering to the needs of the poor and needy that resorted thither. In the 11th century A. D. when in England "even the houses of the rich were very rude and ill-built being constructed mainly of wood," (Tout's History of Great Britain p. 51), Thirumukkudal could boast of up to date colleges and hospitals. When the life of the Briton was rude and "the times were

rude and it was hard to make strong men obey the law" and when "even murder could be allowed by a money payment" called Wergild (p. 52 *ibid*), the students of Thirumukkudal and other Vidhya Pitas in their hundreds and thousands were engaged in their serene studies.

The Vidhya Pitas in Malkapuram (Guntur), Punnavayal (Tanjore), Sri Parameswara's at Talgunda (Shikarpure), Hebbal (Dharwar), Jatigarameswaram (Chitaldrug), Bijapore and Tavargere etc., (Karnataka), Thiruvottiyure (North Arcot), and Thribuvanai (Pondicherry), were all no mean institutions.

A record dated 2—3—I048 (Thribuvanai) discloses that the Vidhya Pita there at which was attached to the Sri Varadaraja Perumal Temple there, was one of the most popular institutions of the period imparting instruction in the Srutis, Upanishads, Sastras, Prabandhas, Vedanta, Vyakarana, Rupavatara, Vaikhanasa Sastra etc.

The Vidhya Pita at Thiruvottiyure specialised in Saiva Sidhdhanta, Prabhakara, Rudra-Yamala, Purana, Siva Dharma, Vyakarana, Soma Siddhanta etc.

The Madura College of Philosophy had during the days of the Vijayanagar Empire 10,000 students on its rolls. (Cf: History of the Aravidu Dynasty—Heras.)

These Sangams, Manrams, Mutts, Vidhya Pitas etc. were endowed with substantial properties whose enormous incomes kept the Guru and the Chela and the Sibbandhis therein far above want and care. The public also gave their "Mahi-mais". The average number of students assigned to a teacher as personal 'charge' (ward) was about 20 under normal circumstances.

The ration for an ordinary student was about 6 Nalis or 4½ seers of rice for each and half a 'kalanji' of gold for one year (let it be remembered that our principal coins in those spacious days of the Chola and the Pandya were of gold or silver and not of copper, bronze, nickel or would be aluminium

coins). Half a 'kalanji' of gold (Rs. 2) was more than sufficient for a student of those days. A student of the highest classes (Mimamsa, Vedanta etc.) had this increased by 60 per cent while the teacher who was expected to have a normal family of 6 souls was remunerated with an income that would be sufficient to maintain 18 souls. Properties endowed to teachers, scholars priests etc. went by the names of Vedavrithi, Battavrithi, Vaidhyavrithi, Maruttuvapperu, Archanavrithi etc.

M. E. R. 277 and 278/1930 (inscriptions in the North wall of the first Prakaram-outside in this temple) refers to endowments made for meeting the expenses of the Vidhyarthi etc. at Thirumalirunjolai. The most arresting feature of all our ancient Vidhya Pitas was that all our Vidhyarthi or students were *not only taught free but were also lodged free, fed free and clothed free!*

Medical Academy.

The Maruthuva Manram presided over by the great Idaikkadar at Sri Alagar Hills 2000 years ago was one of the most famous in the world. (Cf: page 83 and 84 supra.)

All these Mutts and Manrams have now disappeared. The reputation of these Hills as a great and ancient seat of learning now stands gradually diminished to extinction and lying spell-bound as it were in a sort of mysterious stupor. All that remain now to remind us of its past greatness and glory are the remnants of certain works of art, sculpture, painting and the like which still evoke the admiration of savants and connoisseurs. The following few references will show the preeminent position Barata Varsha blessed with such centres as Thirumalirunjolai occupied in the ancient cultural world.

Dr. Cousins, Professor of Modern English Poetry in the University of Tokyo (now of the Travancore University) in one of his lectures delivered under the Travancore Education Department of Art and Culture, sometime ago, has stated "In

extent the Cultural Empire of India has had no equal in human history". In illustration of this he has referred in his lecture to (i) the presence of a Buddhist temple in Singapore with the idol of Buddha and other Hindu images (ii) the frescoes of the Hori-Yuji temple painted in pure Ajantan manner by the Korean pupils of the Indian artists of the 7th century (iii) India's culture spreading to Russia in the 3rd century (iv) and to Khotan and Tibet and South East Asia and the Pacific and Polynesia (v) and the Vatican Latin publication referring to the Gymnosophists or "Naked Philosophers" of Ethiophia-in the 1st century A. D. who were Indian Sages from India.

The United Press of London in an article excerpted in the Hindu of 27—4—36 has the following among other interesting things. "The accidental discovery of an ancient manuscript, following the explosion of a Japanese bomb which blew away a part of the Chinese wall four years ago, now gives the world amazing facts about the Chinese civilisation thousands of years old.The manuscript reveals three important facts.

i. The laws of Manu written in Vedic Language ten thousand years ago were the basis of the Chinese Law.

ii. ".....The Darwinian theory of human evolution is nothing new but was known and accepted in China seven thousand years ago.

iii. The secret of incredible longevity was held by Patriarchs in those days." After referring to the researches and investigations into the above by Sir Augustus Fitz George, Professor Anthony Craeme and Sir Wallace Budge of the British Museum who were of opinion that these discoveries had even greater value than the Codex Sinaiticus the United Press quotes Prof. Craeme as observing. "We have also found and proved that in those days there was a distinct relationship between the peoples of India, America and China. We actually found reference to the ruined cities, which have been found in the centre of the Peruvian forests."

In a note in the Hindu dated 4—2—1936, we find reference to the Pre-Historic Rock-Paintings stated to be 10 to 20 thousand years old discovered on the Kabra Pahad and Singanpore Hills (Raigarh State) 11 miles west of Naharpali Railway Station (B. N. Ry.) These paintings are stated to tally on the one hand with the recently discovered pre-historic cave paintings of France, Spain and Italy and on the other hand with certain others existing in Africa, America and Australia. Closest resemblance between the Indus Valley civilisation and the Atlantic civilisation of 12,000 years ago in the Shot-el- Djarid of North Africa is demonstrated in the excellent article on the subject by Count Alfred A. Hessenste in The Hindu dated 4—8—'33.

Mr. Chaman Lal's "Hindu America" (New Book Company, Hornby Road, Bombay) may be also referred to in this connection. The author herein gives very interesting revelations as regards the ruins of Temples in North and South America and the culture and life of the Mayas, the Aztecs and the Incas whose civilisations and literature far superior to any in Europe were wiped out by the Spanish invaders. He also refers to the social, religious, political and cultural influences which the Surya Vamsha Rulers of India who established Kingdoms in Asia, Europe and America, had exercised over those continents.

The Brahmins and the Budhists in those ancient days carried their culture and philosophy into the various parts of the world. The Chitpavan Brahmins of the Bombay Presidency are stated to be the descendents of those Brahmins who for a time colonised in Egypt and then returned to their ancient home. Dion Chrysostam refers to a Colony of Brahmins at Alexandria in 100 A. D. (History of Tamils—320). Ancient writers refer to the exchange of Embassies between Augustus Ceasar and the Indian Kingdoms in 30 B. C. The Dravidian colony of the Brahuis in Baluchistan, is still a living example of the spread of the Dravidian culture even in the Pre Mohenjo Daro days.

Scholars of research have successfully demonstrated the spread of Dravidian culture in Persia, Mesopotomia, Armenia and even in distant Gaul and Central Europe.

The Ayurveda of the Hindus with the 'Salya', 'Salaga', 'Kaya Chikitsa', 'Butha Vidhya', 'Kumara Britya', 'Aagda', 'Rasayana', and 'Bajikarana' as expounded and proclaimed by Charaka and Susruta, their subtle chemical processes of solutions, evaporations, calcinations, sublimations, and distillations and their practical all-embracing botanical knowledge, their geography, and their wonderful surgery including such operations as lithotomy and extraction of foetus-ex-utero, and their 127 marvellous surgical instruments, some of them so sharp as to divide a hair longitudinally" have been remarkable to a degree. Referring to the decline of all sciences, all arts and all literature in India during the past 1000 years, R. C. Dutt says "Social and religious degeneracy paved the way to ruin and political disaster completed it. The causes have acted and reacted on each other and the loss of political independence induced a grosser national ignorance, an unhealthier superstition, and a more hurtful system of social rules. It will be of some interest to Hindu readers to know, when foreign scientific skill and knowledge are required in every district in India for sanitary and medical work, that 22 centuries ago Alexander the great kept Hindu physicians in his camp for the treatment of diseases which Greek physicians could not heal, and that 11 centuries ago Caliph Haroun Al. Raschid of Baghdad retained two Hindu physicians, known in Arabian records as Manka and Saleh as his own physicians." (R. C. Dutt's Civilisation in Ancient India. Vol III pages 394 and 395).

Ctesias (V Century B. C.) Hippocrates (V century B. C.) Theophrastus (IV century B. C.) and Dioscorides (I Century A. D.) refer to the Hindu system of *Medicine* and have borrowed their *Materia-Medica* from Hindus. Nearchus states Greeks knew no medicine for snake-bite while Indians

cured it easily. Arrian refers to the Greeks applying to Brahmins, when indisposed, for cures and "who by wonderful and even more than human means cured, whatever could admit of cure".

Arya Batta (476 A. D.) was the first Hindu writer on Algebra. He calculated the *earth's circumference* at 3300 Yojanas - (a yojana is 4 Croasas)

Varaha Mihira of Avanti (505 A. D.) wrote his great Encyclopedic *Brihat Samhita*, in or about 505 A. D. a work of 106 chapters relating to Sun, Moon, Earth and Planets.—(Ch. 1-20); rain, winds, earthquakes, meteors, rainbow, dust-storms, thunder-bolts etc., - (Ch. 21 - 39); plants, vegetables, commodities, manufactured and unmanufactured- (Ch. 40-42); house-building, gardening, temples, images, and portents-(Ch. 43-60) Biology and Ethnology-(Ch. 61-78). precious stones, furniture etc.—"From diamonds to toothbrush" as R. C. Dutt says-(Ch. 79-85); Omens-(Ch. 86-96). marriages, Zodiacal divisions etc-(Ch. 97-106). Ch. 14-is a complete geography of India mentioning provinces and towns and Ch. 58 contains-Rules for the construction of various images Viz. Vaishnavite and Saivite and Gods like the Dikh-Palakas, Buddha, Arhat (Buddhist saints), Surya, Bala Deva etc. The worship of the all-benevolent and calm souled God (Buddha) is referred to in Ch. 60 showing the tolerance that prevailed during his time.

Bhaskara Charya's (1114 A. D.) *Sidhanta Siromoni* including Bija Ganita (*Algebra*), the Lilavati (*Arithmetic*) the Goladhyaya (*Spherical Trigonometry*) are world-known works, solutions in some of the remarkable problems of which were not achieved in Europe till the 17th and 18th centuries. "The science of Algebra indeed received a remarkable degree of development in India; the application of Algebra to Astronomical investigations and to Geometrical demonstrations is a peculiar invention of the Hindus and their manner of conducting it has received the admiration of Modern European Mathematicians.

"While such was the progress made in India in Astronomy, Algebra, Arithmetic and Trigonometry, the science of Geometry was lost. The Hindus had discovered the 1st elementary laws of Geometry in the 8th century before Christ and imparted it to the Greeks; but, as the construction of altars according to Geometric rules fell into disuse, Geometry was neglected and Geometrical problems were solved by Algebra.....Arabian writers translated Hindu works on Algebra in the 8th century A. D. and Leonardo of Pisa first introduced the science to Modern Europe. In Trigonometry, too, the Hindus seem to have been the earliest teachers in the world; and in Arithmetic they invented that system of decimal notation which the Arabians borrowed from them and taught in Europe and which is now the property of the human race!" (R. C. Dutt's civilisation in Ancient India, Vol. III. pp. 380 and 381).